

New Funding Spurs Public Transit Growth

Public transit is growing in Montana at an unprecedented pace, thanks to 2005 federal legislation that increased funding by over 200 percent for non-urbanized areas (areas with fewer than 50,000 people). Senator Max Baucus, in his leadership role on the Environment and Public Works Committee, was instrumental in ensuring the 2005-2009 surface transportation reauthorization act, also known as SAFETEA-LU,* addressed transportation issues affecting rural western states, including the need for transit services.

As a result of the increased funding, non-urbanized public transit in Montana has grown from nine programs to over thirty programs in the past year. Among the new programs are Phillips Transit Authority in Malta, Lincoln County Transportation Services, and Richland County Transportation Service. Several more communities are developing new transit systems and existing systems have expanded.

A major change under the new legislation is the requirement that communities coordinate transit planning. In the past, any number of agencies could apply for transit funding in a community. Under SAFETEA-LU, a "lead agency" submits one application per community. All

organizations that provide transit service in the community must approve the plan and are required to consolidate their services. By consolidating services, communities should see increased service without additional cost. Federal social service funds can be used to match federal transit dollars. This allows communities to save their local funds and leverage transportation funds.

SAFETEA-LU also provides funding for two new transit programs: Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom.

JARC will provide grants for programs that help welfare recipients and low-income people get to and from work and work-related services such as childcare and training. In addition, JARC will provide transportation to suburban jobs from urban, rural, and other suburban locations.

The New Freedom Program encourages improvements to transportation services and facilities for persons with disabilities. These are improvements that are new and go beyond the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

For more information, contact Audrey Allums at 444-4210 or aallums@mt.gov.

**Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users*



MDT administers federal grant funds to help support transit agencies that provide rides for the elderly and disabled. Kalispell's Eagle Transit (top) is one such agency. Most of Montana's transit agencies provide rides to the general public as well as to special needs individuals. The Helena Area Transit Service, or HATS, (bottom) provides service to the general public in Helena and East Helena.



From left, David Cobb from Sen. Max Baucus's Bozeman office, MDT Director Jim Lynch, Gallatin County Commissioner John Vincent, and Lisa Knorr, chairperson of Big Sky Transportation District, before one of the Karst Stage buses that will carry passengers between Bozeman and Big Sky.

Skyline Transit Launches New Service

The Skyline Transit System in Big Sky kicked off its new service with a press conference at the Huntley Lodge on Monday, November 27.

The new system will deliver rides at no cost in the Big Sky area and a few miles north and south on U.S. 191. It will also shuttle passengers from Bozeman to Big Sky six times daily during the winter and will return to Bozeman five times daily. Under the sponsorship of Moonlight Basin, the Big Sky/Bozeman trip will be free of charge through June 30, 2007.

At the November 27 ceremony, MDT Director Jim Lynch addressed the audience on his desire to have area agencies coordi-

nate with Skyline Transit to make "Montana accessible to all Montanans." He also stressed the system's ability to ease congestion and increase safety on U.S. 191 by decreasing the number of vehicles traveling through Gallatin Canyon.

The audience also heard speeches from representatives of Senator Max Baucus, the Gallatin County Commissioner's Office, and the Big Sky Transportation District.

The project was made possible by MDT using funds from the Federal Transit Administration and local sponsors. Nearly two years of planning and technical research preceded the system's kickoff.



Legislature to Consider Safety Belt Legislation

Legislators will convene in Helena January 3, 2007, for Montana's 60th Legislative Session. Among the very important legislation they will consider is a primary safety belt law. Montana's current law requires vehicle occupants to wear a safety belt, but does not allow law enforcement officers to stop a vehicle solely because this law is being violated. The law can be enforced only when a motorist is stopped because of another violation.

Changing this restriction is key to saving lives in Montana. In 2005, of the 202 vehicle occupants killed in crashes, 152 (75 percent) were not wearing a safety belt. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that Montana will save 20 to 30 lives each year when the state's safety belt usage rate surpasses 90 percent. Montana's current usage rate is 80 percent. Based on experience in other states, a primary law would likely push this rate to as much as 92 percent, essentially saving up to 30 lives each year.

NHTSA also estimates that when safety belts are worn, the risk of fatal injury to front seat passengers is reduced by 45 percent. In light pickup trucks, safety belts reduce this risk by 60 percent.

In addition, an often overlooked element in support of a primary safety belt law is the cost of injuries incurred in a crash when vehicle occupants are not wearing a safety belt. The cost of hospital care for an unbuckled occupant is up to three times higher than the cost for a buckled occupant. Society, rather than the individuals involved, bears 85 percent of these costs.

There are many reasons for passing a primary safety belt law. The most compelling reason is to save lives and prevent injuries.

State Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan Approved

On September 20, 2006, MDT Director Jim Lynch, acting as Governor Schweitzer's designee for highway safety, formally approved Montana's Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan (CHSP). The event marked the conclusion of a multi-year cooperative effort that began with a commitment in the 2002 update of TranPlan 21, Montana's statewide multi-modal transportation plan.

Montana's CHSP is the result of a comprehensive, collaborative, and data-driven approach to highway safety that brought safety stakeholders together to work toward a common highway safety goal. As one of the first comprehensive highway safety plans in the nation, Montana's CHSP is being used as a model by other states who are developing similar plans in response to a requirement of the 2005–2009 surface transportation reauthorization act (SAFETEA-LU*), which Congress passed in 2005.

Montana's CHSP is a living document that guides the effort to reduce Montana's fatal and incapacitating injury crashes. There are nine initial emphasis areas:

- Safety Belt Use
- Alcohol- and Drug-Impaired Driving Crashes
- Native American Crashes
- Single-Vehicle Run-off-the Road Crashes
- Traffic Records Management
- Young Driver Crashes
- High-Crash Corridors and Locations
- Commercial Vehicle Crashes
- Emergency Medical Services Delivery

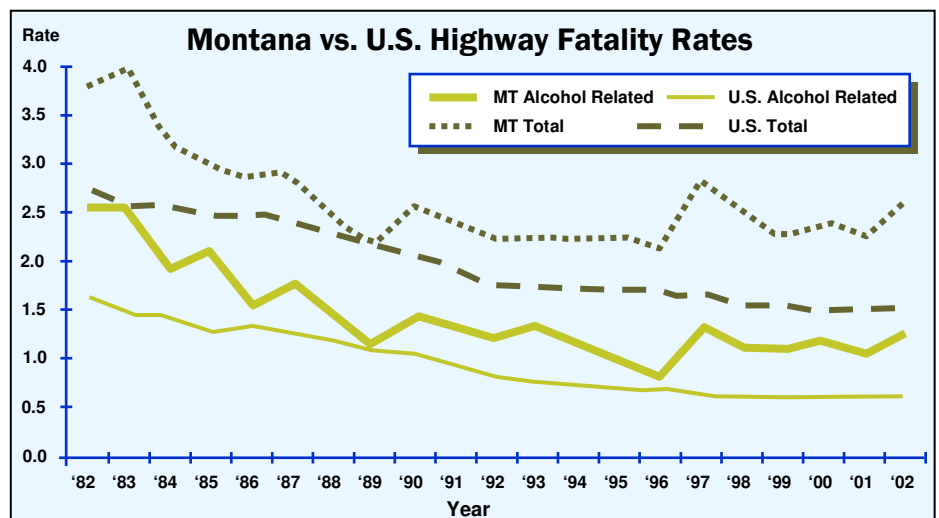
The CHSP establishes strategies for each of the emphasis areas to address crashes identified by the data analysis. For example, if safety belt use in Montana surpassed 90 percent, an estimated 20 to 30 fewer fatalities would occur annually. The CHSP therefore establishes a strategy to enact a primary safety belt enforcement law to help reach this goal.

A champion, or chair, has been appointed for each emphasis area. The champion will be responsible for implementing individual strategies, tracking performance data, and reporting annually to the oversight committee. If the data warrants, the committee will identify new emphasis areas and fine-tune current strategies. MDT staff will facilitate and support the work of the implementation teams and the CHSP oversight committee and will ensure the plan and effort remain alive and moving forward.

To view the CHSP online, go to <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/chsp/>.

For more information, contact Carol Strizich at 444-9240 or cstrizich@mt.gov.

**Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users*



This chart compares Montana's highway fatality rate per 100 million miles traveled with the rate for the U.S. as a whole. It also compares Montana's alcohol-related fatality rates with U.S. alcohol-related fatality rates. In both instances, the Montana fatality rate is higher than the U.S. rate.

MDT Takes Students on a Trip Through Time



Jim Lynch (left) and Montana First Lady Nancy Schweitzer (right) listen intently as Steve Platt (middle) fields a question from a Drummond Elementary School student.

Not every highway project offers a glimpse back in time, so when one does, MDT likes to take full advantage of sharing the information gleaned from such an opportunity. This has certainly been the case with the artifacts found on the reconstruction project for Secondary 271 between Drummond and Helmville.

Most of the artifacts consist of stone tools and butchered animal bone. A number of large prehistoric stone baking ovens have also been found in the upper levels of soil at the site. There is evidence the people who regularly used the site as a base camp made their living by hunting game (bison, deer, and antelope-sized game animals) and gathering wild plant foods (camas, biscuitroot, and various berries). Radiocarbon dates in the area run from just 900 years old to more than 9,000 years old. Sites with this kind of time depth are rare in western Montana.

Steve Platt, MDT archaeologist, has conducted several tours of the site and given several lectures over the last two years. In addition, Platt, along with Crystal Alegria, coordinator for Montana State University's Project Archaeology, have developed a program to take into the classroom.

"Archaeology education is important because it gives kids a chance to learn about the past, often in their own backyards.

Archaeology helps kids understand how people have adapted to their environment over time," said Platt.

Students from Ovando, Drummond, and Helmville have taken part in the program. The first half of the day was spent in the classroom learning about archaeology. Lessons included a flint knapping demonstration and how to carve stone into tools. Kids then traveled to the site to explore and put their new knowledge to work. Because this site is on private land, it's a rare opportunity for these kids to stomp around and discover evidence of what was happening near their homes some 9,000 years ago.

"It provides a way to study the past that kids find interesting, and it helps instill a sense of respect and stewardship for our shared human heritage," Platt continued.

MDT's archaeology work on the site is in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act. The Department is gathering important scientific data from the site prior to construction. Because the archaeology site is so large, only a fraction will be disturbed by the construction. The school programs support the Governor and First Lady's Math and Science Initiative.



Drummond Elementary fourth, fifth, and sixth graders scour the ground for clues to the past.

2007–2008 Highway Map Is Larger, Easier to Read

The 2007-2008 official Montana Highway Map continues to address the needs of the traveling public and Montana citizens. For example, the size of the map has increased nearly 40 percent to 25 inches by 36 inches. As a result, text size is larger, making the map easier to read for our aging population.

Other helpful additions to this year's map include Interstate exit numbers; rest areas that are labeled seasonal, year-round, or as parking areas; insets that show multilane roads; the addition of the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe's headquarters to the Great Falls city inset; and a revised mileage chart. Also, at the request of many Montanans, railroad lines and a latitude/longitude grid have been added.

The larger size has also provided more room for the tourism side of the map. The space is filled with more tourist destinations, a Montana trivia section, and information on Montana's road-side interpretive marker program, which showcases Montana's unique geologic and paleontological wonders.

As usual, populations have been changed to reflect current estimates, and gas station and hospital locations have been updated. The map continues to display traffic regulations; weather report, road condition, and emergency phone numbers; and a welcome message from Governor Schweitzer.

The map will go to print in January and be ready for distribution by the first week in February. To order your copy, call 800-VISIT MT (800-847-4868), or visit the Web at http://www.mdt.mt.gov/mdt/comment_form.shtml.



CTEP Spotlight



The new Conrad Transportation and Historical Museum takes visitors on a journey that begins with ancient foot trails, continues down the Whoop-Up Trail, and ends in the era of steamboats, railroads, and cars.

Conrad Transportation Museum “Wheels in Wheat Country”

A grand opening ceremony on Labor Day weekend marked the end of a dream that was years in the making and the beginning of a new life for an old automobile dealership building in downtown Conrad. Through the efforts of the Pondera Historical Association, Pondera County, the city of Conrad, and many others, the former Wright Chevrolet Building has been transformed into a transportation and historical museum. The museum offers visitors a glimpse into the development of transportation in the “Golden Triangle” area of north-central Montana.

The museum building was constructed in 1907 and had its beginnings in the transportation industry in 1921, serving as an auto repair and tire shop. Subsequent uses included a farm implement dealership and eventual expansion into a General Motors automobile dealership. Vacated in 1978 and left empty for many years, the building was purchased by the Pondera Historical Association in 2000. The association has since deeded the property to the city of Conrad and operates the museum through an agreement with the city.

The city of Conrad and Pondera County contributed nearly \$120,000 of CTEP funds and local matching funds toward the project cost. Donated money and materials as well as many hours of volunteer labor brought this community-based project to fruition. Davidson/Kuhr Architects of Great Falls provided architectural services for the project. Morrison-Maierle, Inc. of Helena handled the design and construction engineering services. Dick Olson Construction of Great Falls was the construction contractor.

For more information about the Conrad transportation museum, visit <http://russell.visitmt.com/listings/16395.htm>.

CTEP is MDT's Community Transportation Enhancement Program. For more information, contact Mike Wherley at 444-4221 or mwherley@mt.gov.

New Web Site Offers User-Friendly Information for Aviators

Montana pilots and aviation buffs will welcome MDT's newly redesigned Aeronautics Division Web site. The site consolidates information into a user-friendly tool covering a variety of aviation information including upcoming workshops and events, airport maps and information, aviation scholarships, and more. In addition, applications for MDT's general aviation airport loan and grant program are now available online.

The Aeronautics Division's responsibilities include facilitating the maintenance of airports and the various components of airport infrastructure and administering a loan and grant program to help municipal governments fund airport improvement projects. The division also fosters, promotes, and supervises aviation and aviation safety through educational efforts and programs; registers aircraft and pilots; and coordinates and supervises aerial search-and-rescue operations.

MDT owns and operates 15 public-use airports and all non-directional radio beacons and unicom within the state. Additionally, MDT inspects all public-use airports, publishes an aeronautical chart and directory, and provides individuals and communities with engineering and technical assistance.

The Web site supports these and other functions of the Aeronautics Division. The site can be accessed through www.mdt.mt.gov or directly at www.mdt.mt.gov/aviation.

Montana Air-Service Study Identifies Challenges



A recent study on the status of air service in Montana found that Montana is one of the lowest-ranking states in the continental U.S. for passenger activity and has some of the highest airfares in the country.

MDT, in conjunction with the Montana Department of Commerce, initiated the research project in late 2004. A team consisting of Wilbur Smith Associates, Morrison Maierle, and the Louis Berger Group conducted the study, which offered recommendations on how the state can improve and expand its air service. The project also established work plans to achieve the goal of improved and expanded air service.

When ranked by outbound domestic passengers, Montana ranked 39th in the continental U.S. in 2005. When ranked by average one-way fares, Montana was 45th, the fourth highest. The average one-way fare paid by domestic passengers originating in Montana was \$168.14 in 2005—\$24 more than the average one-way fare paid by other U.S. domestic passengers.

Among the study's recommendations was that the state continue to support the Essential Air Service, a federal program to guarantee scheduled air service to small communities. The study also recommended the state create an air-service development program and develop a statewide marketing campaign.

To view the study summary online, go to http://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/docs/research_proj/airchallenge/project_summary.pdf.

For more information on MDT's research program, contact Craig Abernathy at 444-6269 or cabernathy@mt.gov.

Before & After

S-323 South of Ekalaka

Before



After



Taken about 25 miles south of Ekalaka on Secondary Highway 323, these photos show the dramatic difference all-weather gravel surfacing made to a road that was at times passable only with a four-wheel drive vehicle. All-weather gravel surfacing contains a binder that holds the aggregates together and keeps the road passable in adverse weather. The surface retains its shape and can even stand up to a snowplow.

US-287 Passing Lanes–North of Three Forks

Before



After



Passing was difficult and dangerous on this long, uphill section of U.S. 287. MDT widened the road to four lanes and lowered the grade at the top of the hill by approximately 10 feet. This is the fourth segment of U.S. 287 between Helena and Three Forks that has been reconstructed to incorporate passing lanes.

Madison River–32 Miles South of Ennis

Before



After



Situated on the historic Vigilante Trail, the Hutchins Bridge crosses the Madison River just north of Reynolds Pass. It was built in its present form in 1902 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Some time ago, MDT bridge inspectors rated the bridge "structurally deficient" and limited it to foot traffic only. The timber abutment planking that held back the roadbed was rotting, splitting, and no longer strong enough to retain the dirt embankment. Similarly, the abutment's caissons were founded on untreated timber piles, and the piles were losing strength.

MDT replaced both abutments with new concrete backwalls and replaced the steel floor beams, timber stringers, decking, and driving planks. The rehabilitated bridge is now open to vehicular traffic and is expected to last another 100 years.

Fire Reveals Historic Mullan Road

by Jon Axline, MDT Historian

In August 2005, several small fires started along Interstate 90 about two miles west of the community of Alberton. High winds coupled with bone-dry vegetation quickly fused the many small fires into one raging inferno that not only closed the Interstate, but threatened homes, livestock, and even burned into the outskirts of Alberton. By the time the fire was under control, it had burned 11,245 acres, devastating what had been prime forest land in the scenic canyon west of Alberton. Fortunately, no lives or homes were lost in the conflagration. The fire even had a benefit—it opened a new window into Mineral County’s colorful past.

Mineral County has a rich history that includes mining, logging, railroads, the infamous Camel’s Hump section of old U.S. Highway 10, and a catastrophic forest fire that burned much of northern Idaho and western Montana in 1910, claiming the lives of 85 people. But what the county is mostly recognized for today is its connection to the Mullan Road, the first engineered road in Montana and the state’s first federal-aid highway.

A road between Walla Walla, Washington, and Fort Benton, the head of navigation on the Missouri River, was the dream of a young West Point graduate named John Mullan.

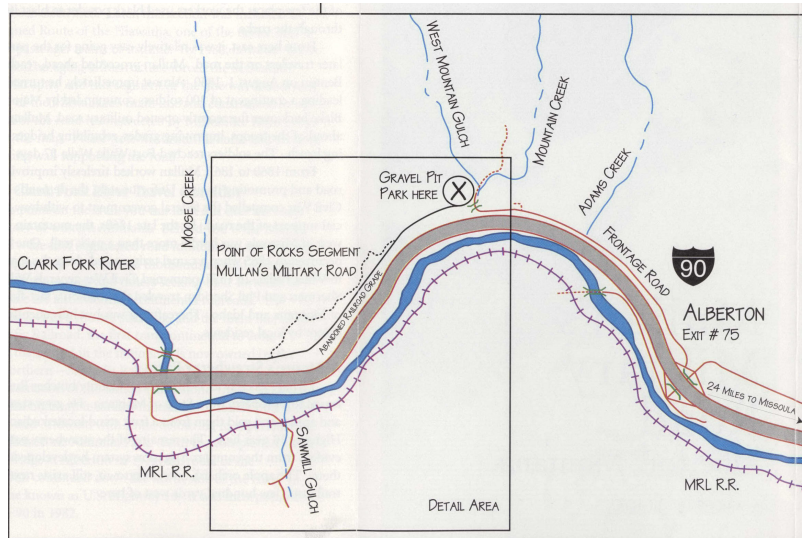
In 1852, the U.S. Army detailed Lieutenant Mullan to assist Isaac Stevens in surveying a route for a northern transcontinental railroad. Stevens soon instructed Mullan to seek “routes practicable for a . . . wagon road” across the northern Rocky Mountains. Although a proponent of the railroad as the agent of civilization, Stevens was just as sure of the civilizing benefits of an engineered wagon road. It wasn’t until March 1859, however, that Congress appropriated \$100,000 for the construction of the road between Walla Walla and Fort Benton. Work on it began four months later. Mullan and his 230-man detachment crossed over the Bitterroot Mountains into Montana at St. Regis Pass in early December 1859. By the time harsh weather halted construction for the season, Mullan’s work crews had completed a little less than half of the 624-mile road. Work on it resumed in mid-March 1860.

By late April 1860, the company reached a mountain spur that extended down to the edge of the Clark Fork River, making a road along the river bank impossible. Called the Big Side Cut and Point of Rocks segments, Mullan detailed 150 men to build the road across the mountains. Construction began in May 1860 and continued for the next six weeks. Because of the rocks along the planned route, the work crews had to use black

powder to blast a route through the extensive outcrops. This arduous segment of the road was difficult to construct and resulted in serious injuries to some workers because of the volatile explosive. Although Mullan later claimed the rock cuts along this segment of the road were between 15 and 20 feet wide, they are, in fact, much narrower. One traveler later wrote that “not an inch more rock was removed than apparently necessary,” so that one could not walk next to a wagon passing through them.

From the Point of Rocks eastward, however, construction of the road progressed rapidly as Mullan utilized well-worn aboriginal trails. By July 1, they had crossed the Blackfoot River and, four weeks later, reached Fort Benton. Upon Mullan’s

arrival there, he was met by a detachment of soldiers who had been ordered to travel to Walla Walla over the newly completed road. With Mullan in the lead, the troops left Fort Benton on August 5, 1860, arriving in Walla Walla two months later. Although the road was intended to facilitate the movement of troops and supplies in the Pacific Northwest, this was the only instance where the Mullan Road was used for military purposes. Within a couple years, the Mullan Road



west of Missoula had deteriorated into a little-used tangle of fallen timber and washed-out bridges. Even the Montana gold rush in the early 1860s failed to reinvigorate it.

Mullan continued to make improvements to his road until 1862, when the federal government withdrew its financial support. Although civilian freighters and emigrants extensively used the Fort Benton to Helena and Missoula sections of the Mullan Road, the road west of Missoula was little more than a pack trail by 1864, occasionally playing host to a few mule and camel trains. General William Tecumseh Sherman traversed the Point of Rocks section west of Missoula in the summer of 1877. Although he was optimistic about the potential of the Mullan Road in western Montana, it failed to catch on as a significant freight road and was seldom used except by local residents.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, the old Mullan Road in Mineral County had been superseded by more modern transportation systems, including the Milwaukee Road Railroad and the Yellowstone Trail, the precursor to U.S. Highway 10 and I-90. Over the ensuing years, the Point of Rocks segment of the Mullan Road was largely forgotten, isolated by the Milwaukee Road, U.S. 10, and the Interstate. Ironically, the



The Point of Rocks segment of the Mullan Road, shown in the photographs above, was one of the few places where workers were forced to use black powder to blast their way through the rocks. Mullan, himself, described the segment as a “severe piece of work [that] cost us the labor of 150 men for six weeks.”

construction of the other roads helped preserve the Mullan Road in parts of Mineral County, including on the hillside above the Clark Fork near Alberton. There it remained, nearly forgotten, until near the beginning of the 21st century.

In 1999, MDT, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and Alberton-area resident Chuck Mead completed a complicated land trade that placed both the Mullan Road’s Point of Rocks segment and an abandoned segment of the Milwaukee Road Railroad under the ownership of MDT. The Department used the property as mitigation to offset the impact of MDT projects on other historic road segments in Montana. It is MDT’s intent to develop the property as a bicyclist/pedestrian trail peppered with interpretive markers relating the stories of the old road and the railroad. To that end, two historical markers have been installed there and a brochure produced about Point of Rocks segment of the Mullan Road. MDT maintenance forces developed a small parking area at the entrance to the segments.

When fire swept through the area in 2005, it destroyed most of the large trees and much of the underbrush along the Mullan Road segment. Unfortunately, it also damaged a railroad tunnel on the abandoned railroad grade so badly that it had to be permanently closed to public access. But, it also initiated a new chapter in the long history of the road.

When Randall Hewitt and his party passed through the area in 1862, the forest around them still smoldered from a major fire. In the ensuing 143 years, trees had grown up again along the road, obscuring many of its features. Indeed, whole segments were not readily discernable because of the thick undergrowth.

The fire left a stark black, gray, and brown landscape, but after the dead trees were removed in early 2006 and the vegetation began to reassert itself that summer, the Point of Rocks segment took on a whole new look and a new meaning. The removal of the trees and underbrush opened up the area making it possible to clearly see Mullan’s original 1860 road alignment, the improvements he made in 1861 and 1862, and the modifications made by the Milwaukee Road Railroad in 1908. Indeed, the landscape now probably looks much closer to what Mullan

and Sherman actually experienced in the 19th century than what visitors had grown accustomed to over the last decade.

Revenue from the sale of the dead timber in 2006 was used to plant new trees, repair segments of the road that had been damaged by fire-fighting equipment, and pay for the installation of at least five new interpretive markers. Even the collapse of the railroad tunnel had some benefit—the new path constructed around it provides excellent views of Glacial Lake Missoula sediments and the scour caused when the lake last emptied over 13,000 years ago.

Plans are currently underway to map the Point of Rocks from the air and use the Global Positioning System (GPS) to accurately place it on maps. It is the ultimate goal of Mullan Road enthusiasts to create a GPS map of the entire Mullan Road from Walla Walla to Fort Benton. So, while at first glance, the 2005 Alberton area fire appeared to be a bad thing, in regard to the historic Mullan Road, it has actually been a benefit allowing us to learn more about this significant pioneer highway and the methods used to build it. It will also allow the public to better enjoy and appreciate this little piece of Montana’s colorful past.



The application deadline for Safe Routes to School is December 31, 2006. Applications should be mailed to the

MDT Rail, Transit & Planning Division at P.O. Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620-1001 or dropped off at the division’s office at 2550 Prospect Avenue in Helena. For more information, see our Web site: www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/saferoutes/.

MDT Wants Your Comments

To receive a list of highway projects MDT plans to present to the Transportation Commission, visit http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/docs/trans_comm/proposed_proj.pdf, or give us a call at 1-800-714-7296. You can mail your comments on proposed projects to MDT at the following address or e-mail them to mdtnewprojects@mt.gov.

MDT Project Analysis Chief
PO Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001

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Contact Information

Only the most frequently requested numbers are listed here. For an area or person not listed, call 800-714-7296 (in Montana only) or 406-444-3423. The TTY number is 406-444-7696 or 800-335-7592.

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MDT attempts to provide accommodations for any known disability that may interfere with a person participating in any service, program, or activity of the Department. Alternative accessible formats of this information will be provided upon request. For further information call (406)444-3423, TTY (800)335-7592, or the Montana Relay at 711.

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MDT's mission is to serve the public by providing a transportation system and services that emphasize quality, safety, cost effectiveness, economic vitality and sensitivity to the environment.

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